

Growing Olive Trees

PLANTING OLIVE TREES

Cultural Requirements Some olives are self-fruitful, but all are best with cross-pollination. Due to the olive tree's hardiness & adaptability, the majority of varieties can survive in just about any climate except the tropics or the poles. They can withstand drought. However, it must be noted that olives will often survive in a harsh climatic zone at the expense of the crop; where the grower wants healthy, trees and regular, heavy crops, climate must not be overlooked.

Cold Climates Includes areas where temperatures can fall below 18°F and snow may fall occasionally. These regions generally only grow oil olives as they are less prone to heavy frost damage. A brief International Olive Oil Council summary of the cold hardiness of olives follows: "The olive can withstand low temperatures of 18°F or even 14°F, and even lower as long as it is not subjected to them for many hours, thawing proceeds slowly and the tree is not at the active growing period (March-October in California). During the vegetative stage, the olive tree is sensitive to low temperatures which can cause damage to twigs and secondary branches, and even to the trunk and scaffold branches. Resistance to cold is a varietal trait. To ensure it fruits well, the olive does, however, need temperatures close to 32°F which induce vegetative rest. It withstands high summer temperatures well, and even lack of ground moisture, although it then adjusts its growing activity to an essential minimum". Out of the cultivars, the most commonly selected for these cold climates are Frantoio, Pendolino and Ascolana.

Moderate Climates - Areas where minimum winter temperatures are generally 25°-27°F and very rarely go below 21°F. Such areas are considered to be typical of the world's olive growing regions. These areas provide the necessary winter chill requirements for dormancy without being so cold as to possibly damage any late season crop. All the cultivars we offer are known to be suitable in such areas.

Warm Climates Includes areas which have an average daily temperature in Jan of 54° F or less and rarely frost or fall below 28°-32°F are generally considered unsuitable or marginal for commercial olive groves as they do not allow the trees to rest during winter and thereby reduce their ability to flower and set fruit in Spring. Out of the cultivars we offer, the ones believed to be most suitable for these warm areas are (also) Frantoio, Pendolino & Manzanillo.

For table olives, choose from the following varieties: Manzanillo, Picholine and Ascolana. For oil olives, choose from the following varieties: Frantoio, Bouteillan and Pendolino.

Planting Instructions Fruit trees are a lifetime investment and caring for them properly, right from the start, will insure years of enjoyment & productivity. The greater the investment in early care, the less maintenance that will be required as the tree matures. Fall is the best time to plant olives with early Spring being a good second choice. Early

Spring is ideal because it avoids the hard frost of December & January. A good spacing to follow is 18' x 14' if planting in an orchard. This allows enough space for air & light to penetrate. If dry-farming your trees, choose a bigger tree spacing of 24' x 24'. Too much water is the olive tree's worst enemy. If your soils are too heavy and/or tend to hold excessive water during extended rainy periods, you will have to improve the drainage or even change the site of your grove to allow for extra drainage. Do not plant olives in areas that collect water, seep water after rain or hold soil moisture to the point of becoming boggy. Some soils won't drain sufficiently no matter what you do. Dig a hole twice the width of the root ball. Place the tree in the hole at the same depth as it was in the pot. Do not disturb the roots. Add the fill soil (mixed with high quality soil conditioner or organic matter) back in & water thoroughly. Although olive trees are drought resistant, they will need irrigation when young in order to establish themselves. When mature, if drought is continued, the tree may survive but at the expense of the crop. Consider supplemental irrigation in times of severe drought.

Fertility Olive trees require little fertilization and can be grown in just about any type of soil for as long as it is not water-logged. Usually compost is sufficient for well-balanced soils. It should be applied in late Winter or early Spring, on the surface in a broad ring around the plant. A pH of 7-8 is ideal (a pH of 7 is right in the middle, or "neutral"). Add lime (if pH is too low or "acidic") or gypsum (if pH is too high or "basic" due to salts or Sodium) or sulfur (if pH is too high due to Calcium) to adjust your soil's pH, once you have tested your soil.

Pruning and Harvesting Once a basic tree shape is developed either as a multi trunk with 3 - 5 main leaders originating close to the ground or as a vase with the central trunk branching into two or three main leaders at a height of 3- 4' that support the scaffolding of the tree, the only pruning required is that of removing cross branches and opening the center of the tree to allow light to penetrate. Harvesting is facilitated by limiting the height of the tree to 12'. You may need to remove suckers from younger trees. Olives can withstand heavy pruning for ornamental use. Harvest green or black, depending on use. Most fruit ripens in the Fall. All olives must be cured before you can eat them. Olives can stain concrete pavement.